

**Soldiers** *Online*

# Shaping Soldiers' Ca



**MSG James Bragg, chief instructor in the Army Recruiting and Retention School's Retention Department, demonstrates the skills needed during the sort of counseling session that can determine the course of a soldier's career.**

**W**HEN a soldier thinks he's in the Army simply to meet a time requirement, he starts thinking it's time he could spend doing something else," said SFC J.D. Riley, senior career management NCO at the Army's Recruiting and Retention School at Fort Jackson, S.C.

He's among the 765 career counselors worldwide who work with soldiers throughout their careers to ward off that idea.

Many people think the roles of career counselor, re-enlistment NCO and retention NCO are interchangeable, Riley said. "But there are distinct differences. Career counseling is a very important part of the retention process, beyond merely re-enlistment."

Retention and re-enlistment NCOs typically work in those capacities as an additional-duty assignment. Their training is usually limited to one week of instruction provided through the

school's Mobile Retention Training program, said MSG James Bragg, chief instructor in the school's Retention Department.

By comparison, career counselors are assigned to most battalion- and brigade-size units, full time, said SFC Roger Davis, another instructor at the school. They deploy with their units and usually serve as career counselors until they leave the Army.

At battalion level, they help soldiers plan their careers. At brigade level, they supervise subordinate career counselors and manage the brigade commander's retention program, Bragg said.

Under Army Regulation 601-280, Appendix C, career counselors must conduct periodic counseling sessions with soldiers to assess career progression, among other things, and provide information, options and recommendations.

A four-phase counseling approach under the Army Retention System

recommends they conduct problem-solving counseling within 30 days of the time a soldier is assigned to a particular unit, Davis said. "This ensures that soldiers' needs are being met."

A career-development counseling session is normally conducted within 30 to 60 days of unit assignment, followed soon after by an interview by the commander to gauge job performance and potential, Davis said.

The retention-phase interview occurs approximately 15 months before a soldier is due to ETS. At this time, counselors reiterate what the Army has to offer, such as re-enlistment bonuses, in hopes of obtaining a re-enlistment commitment.

"Learning about qualifications for re-enlistment options and bonuses, is, by itself, technically demanding," said Riley. "But I can bridge the gap between career development and ETS in about an hour. Retention is all about soldier development."

"We have to know a little about everything: finance, personnel, assignment policies, some legal aspects — including benefits upon leaving the service and opportunities available in the reserve component," Bragg added.

Career counselors advise soldiers about such career enhancers as earning education points for military and civilian education, gaining recognition through medals for special achievements and serving in diverse assignments.

"Soldiers who perform different jobs with varying degrees of responsibility show that the Army can challenge them with something new and they'll be successful," Riley said.

Career counselors additionally discuss a soldier's promotion potential in his or her present MOS.

"The soldier might not know that if he's in an over-strength MOS it's not good for him or the Army," Riley said. "When a soldier is facing that kind of obstacle to promotion, I encourage him to reclassify."

"Today it's 'up' or 'out' of the Army," he added. "So career progression is extremely important. When you tell a soldier he can't go to the Advanced Noncommissioned Officer Course, for example, because he's deployed, you need to have someone who can ensure that he will go."

"People say career counselors don't contribute in contingency operations," Riley said. "But soldiers who are away from home station need us more than ever. And we've always been taken to the fights."

The fact is, "Just as soldiers need chaplains for spiritual support, they need career counselors for career support," he said.

SFC Timothy Wallace, a career counselor assigned to Headquarters and HQs Company, 2nd Brigade, 1st Armored Division, arrived in Kosovo last December. As senior theater

career counselor, he visited soldiers at all the base camps in the region, including Camp Able Sentry in Macedonia.

Doing his job in the deployed environment is challenging, Wallace said, "because soldiers may respond to a riot in the morning and meet with me a few hours later to talk about staying in the Army."

"There are a lot of 'fence-sitters' here who can't decide whether to stay in or get out," Wallace continued. "Many arrive here and see the devastation. Then they realize the people are the same as you and me, only in a devastated land. Suddenly, it hits them that they're doing something they couldn't do in civilian life — improve these people's lives."

Besides that, Wallace said, soldiers walk into his office every day with finance problems. Some question whether they should stay in the Army because they've been told they could be making more money on the outside.

"I tell them, 'Hey, you can't make

\$100,000 without an education or a skill,'" Wallace said.

He and his subordinates tell those soldiers about setting up IRAs and show them what they can do after 15 years of growth.

"We bring their families into the picture, too, showing them they can make a good life in the Army. I tell them that getting out on a dream isn't the best way to go," he said.

Many come into Wallace's office without a full plan, he said. Recently, a soldier considered ETSing because his brother-in-law offered him a job. "Sometimes we encourage soldiers to take leave before ETSing to find out exactly what the situation is."

"It's not just about keeping soldiers in the Army, but getting them to want to stay," Wallace said. "We're not the reason soldiers reenlist; commanders are. We're here to help the commanders. And we're not about numbers — if you take care of soldiers, the numbers will take care of themselves." □



**Interviewing is a key part of the career counselor's job, and students are instructed in the most effective techniques. Here, instructor SFC Richard F. Jones evaluates students' interviewing skills by videotape.**



**SSG Keith L. Smith (left)** of 1st Battalion, 319th Field Artillery, Fort Bragg, N.C., interviews **SSG Gary R. Avins** of 2nd Squadron, 211th Armored Cavalry Regiment, Fort Irwin, Calif., as the two students practice a counseling session.

# Career Counselor Qualifications

**TO qualify for the Career Counselor program soldiers must be promotable sergeants with less than 8 years in service and have completed BNCOC, or be staff sergeants with less than 10 years in service and less than two years time in grade, said SFC J.D. Riley, senior career management NCO at the Army's Recruiting and Retention School at Fort Jackson, S.C.**

**"In the '80s a lot of people ended up in the military occupational specialty because they had a physical profile that prevented them from being deployed," Riley said. "Today you can't be a career counselor if you have a physical profile." The exception is someone who was already working in the MOS when he or she was injured.**

**Soldiers acquire the title Career Counselor and MOS 79S by completing the eight-and-a-half week Basic Career Counselor Course at the Recruiting and Retention School. The school's curriculum also includes the Advanced Noncommissioned Officer Course and the Mobile Retention Training program.**

**Some 100 students graduate from the basic course annually, Riley said. — Heike Hasenauer**



**At Arlington National Cemetery's Tomb of the Unknowns, SFC Alan Marinoff (left) takes the oath of re-enlistment from MAJ Joseph Dichairo as the 3rd U.S. Infantry (The Old Guard) career counselor, SFC Cary Potts, holds the flag.**